

August 13, 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Head lice have become more and more of a problem over the last few years. The number of children infested with head lice is increasing all across the country. Control of head lice depends on prompt diagnosis and effective treatment. Your help in inspecting your child at least weekly throughout the school year for the presence of head lice would be greatly appreciated.

The louse is a small, flat, grayish insect. It does not hop or fly and is found only on humans. The louse's eggs, called nits, appear as tiny white specks bonded (cemented) to individual hair shafts near the scalp. Look for nits behind the ears and on the nape of the neck (upper back of the neck). They resemble dandruff, but stick firmly to the hair. Head scratching is often the first sign that there is a problem.

Nits (baby lice) will hatch in 8-11 days. Once hatched, they will further develop to form adult lice. Adult lice usually survive three (3) days off the body but may live up to ten (10) days. Head lice are spread mostly by direct head-to-head contact. The sharing of hats, combs, and other hair accessories may also spread head lice.

We conduct routine screenings at school if a student is found to have live lice, parents are notified, and the student is sent home. Classrooms are vacuumed, desks are cleaned, and bathrooms are disinfected daily at school. If we have an outbreak in a classroom, coats are put in plastic bags.

We suggest the following procedure for inspecting your child for head lice:

1. Under bright light begin looking at the back of the head just above the neck area.
2. Part the hair section by section and look closely for head lice or nits (eggs). Eggs will usually be located near the scalp.
3. Depending of the length and thickness of the hair, it should take between 5 and 15 minutes to properly inspect a child's head.

If you suspect your child is infested with head lice, please notify the school nurse. In addition, the entire family should be inspected for head lice as well. The following information may be helpful in treating your family. **Please consult your doctor regarding which treatment he/she recommends.**

Over-the-counter/ prescription treatment

- ✓ Head lice may be treated with shampoos specifically labeled for head lice.
- ✓ Read and follow the label direction carefully and specifically. Parents should use caution when dealing with any insecticide, particularly on children.
- ✓ If the package directions indicate, apply a second treatment 10 days after the first application to kill lice that hatch after the initial treatment.
- ✓ Lice shampoos do not remove the eggs from the hair.

- ✓ You should not treat anyone who does not have live lice (or nits close to the head) and do not use these products as a prevention method to avoid lice.
- ✓ Combing can help further reduce the number of live lice and nits on the hair.

Remove Head lice and nits:

- ✓ Use a fine-toothed louse or nit comb. These combs may be included within packages of chemical treatment or you may buy one from most drug stores. Combs with metal teeth spaced close together seem to work best.
- ✓ Hair should be cleaned and well-combed or brushed to remove tangles before using a louse comb. Clean the louse comb frequently to remove any caught lice or eggs.
- ✓ Sit behind your child and use a bright light (and magnification if needed) to inspect and comb through the hair, one small section at a time.
- ✓ Repeat combing until no more active lice are observed.
- ✓ Comb daily until no live lice are discovered for two weeks. It may take several hours each night for several nights to tackle the problem.
- ✓ Adult female lice cement eggs to the base of a hair shaft near the skin. As the hair grows, eggs are moved away from the scalp. Eggs more than ¼ inch from the scalp are nearly always hatched and this does not mean live lice are present.
- ✓ Combs, brushes, hats and other hair accessories in contact with an infested person should be washed in hot water each day to dislodge any lice or nits.

Treatment of clothes, house, and car:

- ✓ A clothes dryer set at high heat or a hot pressing iron will kill lice or their eggs on pillowcases, sheets, clothes, towels, and similar items your child has been in contact with in the past 2 days.
- ✓ Lice and their eggs on objects (e.g. toys) may be killed by freezing temperatures. Objects that cannot be put in a clothes dryer may be placed in a freezer (or outdoors if sufficiently cold) for several days. You may also bag items for 2 weeks.
- ✓ Lice off the head usually die within 2-3 days and eggs generally cannot live much longer. Vacuuming the house is recommended.
- ✓ Insecticide spray may be used for home, vehicles, carpets, and furniture. However, if you have children with allergies or asthma, you should consult your doctor. Proper cleaning can eliminate the need for insecticides.

We appreciate your prompt action in using the measures listed above to lessen the opportunity for lice and eggs to further spread throughout the school. Please call your school nurse if you have questions or need financial assistance. Remember, head lice do not carry disease nor does their presence indicate your child is dirty. Thank you for taking time to routinely examine your child and working with us on this matter.

Sincerely,

J. Anderson, School Nurse